

# LIMERICK SOCIALIST

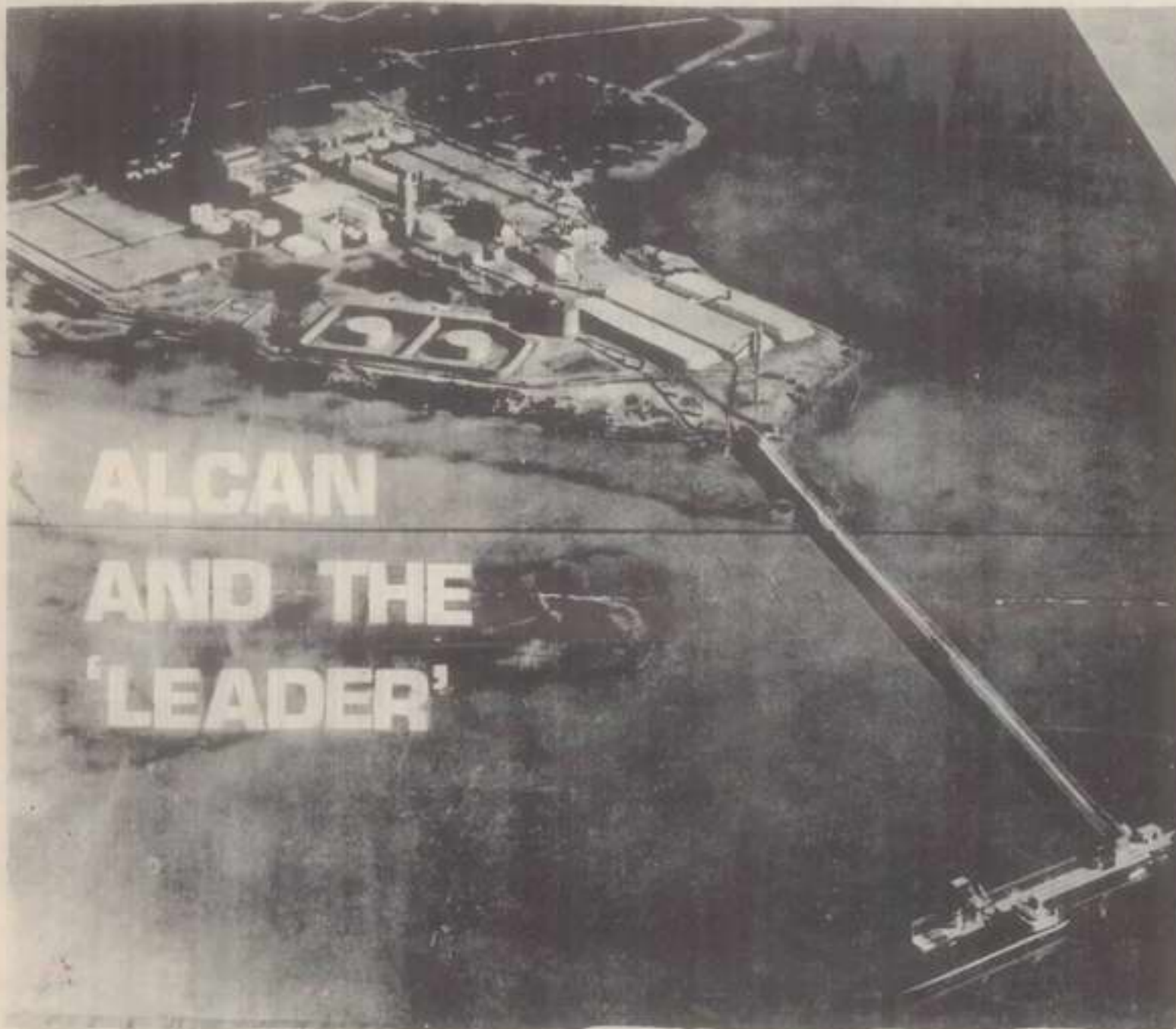
THE  
VOICE  
OF THE  
WORKER

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"That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . ." *James Connolly*



**ALCAN  
AND THE  
'LEADER'**

## WHITE'S GARAGE



Michael Kennedy pictured outside his home, March, 1974.



**THE  
'SEVEN DAYS'  
DRUG TRIP**



ECHOES FROM

- THE -

# BOTTOM DOG

"We must look at life in all its aspects from the point of view of the "Bottom Dog"—the oppressed—be it nation, class, or sex."

Chorus

No. 21. 15th MAY, 1918. Price 1/6d

## LABOUR DAY AND ITS LESSONS

Two dates will stand out boldly in Limerick history for 1918, April 23 — the first full stop of Labour to resist conscription — and May 1 — the first May-day Labour celebration. We drafted on April 23 what we would not have. We said (and meant it) that no nation or man had a right to dispose of the freedom and life of any man without his consent. — How every R.D.'s in Limerick have this freedom? Ask the owners of White Wine Lane or Lady's Lane, living in hotels and paying rent for homes safe for human habitations. Ask the poor mother starving to some grub and never succeeding, groveling in the dirt of the gutter. Yes, we are not to fight conscription as just form, military or capitalist, because we believe in the freedom to live, and when we've defeated the first, in God's name, let us dream the same moral sentiment to defeat the second in Limerick. Let us begin by thinking for ourselves instead of paying any leader to think for us. Let us first find out what we want, why we want it, and how we are going to get it. Do we want a living wage? If so it is to be in L.S.D. or the purchasing power of L.S.D. Are we going to be in any contact with the position of wage slaves, even if well paid? Do we want decent houses with plots attached or are we content with Jones Row, Flag Lane, and the suppression of the Public Health Act for the duration of the war? It's up to us to decide these things, we have organised in Limerick a force that can secure them, but the specific work has got to be done by the individual members of the Union; so get your heads going — don't produce all you hear — don't things out in your working and trade union branches and having settled what you want, no power on earth can stop you getting it, if back by One Big Union. We want in the Irish Labour Movement strong, independent, clear-headed men with backbone. In heaven's name let us set about making conditions which will produce these men.

## LIMERICK NO. 1 RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

(On A Little Bit Of Hell)

Have you ever heard the story of how Midley played the game? 'T'll tell you so you'll understand from whence the "rno" came. And no wonder that we're named of him and all the R.D.C.'s. For here's the way the story goes that baffled the poor R.D.'s.

But the famous Joseph Midley tumbled into town one day, And settled in this Council and faith was not going astray, And when the members found that Joe was so useful there, They said "suppose we keep him", and 'twas sanctioned from the chair, They they blundered in with sawdust just to make their fortunes grow. No other place you'd find such knaves as matter where you go, Thus they swept the gold and silver just to make themselves first grand, And when they had it finished now they said 'twas all well planned. So we've the dear old land and cottage with its wooden creaking roof, No other place in God's fair earth could Joseph say 'twas spent. And no wonder that the Bottom Dog a rat began to smell, For instead of bits of heaven, he was getting bits of hell.

Chorus

The Great Southcoast Railway, since Monday 22nd April, close their Goods Yards each day at 5 p.m., after which goods will not be received. Printed notices proclaim this to all concerned, but the Great Southcoast is nothing if not capitalistic and sides with the firm out to crush the workers. One day lately, a cart load of butter arrived from Donohoe's Creamery in charge of two scabs. It was after 5 p.m. — nearer to 6 p.m. — the porter in charge of the gate refused admission. But the scabs were not daunted, and set to work to get a permit from the officials in the office, which they succeeded in doing, got the butter into the Goods Yard and had it dispatched that night. We wonder what the local butter merchants have to say to this preferential treatment by the Great Southcoast.

NO. 22. 15th MAY, 1918. PRICE 1/6d

The Limerick Citizens' and Ratepayers' Society at first glance appears to be a very praiseworthy aggregation, but on reading the report in the Press of its last general meeting one's views change. The general meeting we found numbered just a few more than would be found in a Crozier's hospital, and they were of the wealthy and capitalist class. The Society has been incorporated and a permit of its memorandum and articles of association reveal its real purpose "to secure or assist in securing the election of public representatives of the local bodies of the City Borough or County Borough jointly with other districts all the best representatives

obtainable irrespective of creed or politics", then we have the various Fairs of the Society in a nutshell. For some time past Labour in Limerick has been making itself felt and it looks as if in the future it will come into a good share of its own, including due and proper representation on local Councils. The wealthy employing classes recognise this, and to keep their end up they must do something. What more natural than that they should try to slip into power under the guise of economy and the taxpayer's interest? But we think the effort is futile. The scales have fallen from the eyes of the R.D.'s and they are determined that what is theirs they shall have. We notice that the Society's solicitor is Mr. P.J. O'Sullivan. What does the County Council, whose yard solicitor he is, think of his services being given to a Society which may yet tackle the County Council in its efficiency campaign?

Keep Your Eye on the local press. The capitalist "Chronicle" in its weekly report of last Sunday's anti-conscription meeting, practically assumed that it should have been proclaimed by the authorities, and arrogantly insisted to the city hands attending as "amateur bands". Had it been a meeting meeting the "Chronicle" would have a different tale to tell. When you buy the "Chronicle" you support conscription.

## A "SCANDALOUS" THOUGHT FOR CIVIC WEEK

### SUPPORT OF DANCE IN AID OF PROTESTANT CHURCH

Rev. Dear Sir: — Would you be so kind as to answer the below in your esteemed journal?

A Protestant minister got up a dance to raise funds to pay for some necessary repairs in his church, playing 4s. entrance fee. A number of local Catholics went to the dance. Were they justified in doing so?

Perplexed

In 1822 the Sacred Penitentiary was asked whether it was lawful for Catholics to contribute money for the erection of heathen temples. The following reply was given: "Affirmative, and tantum ad se tangat tempus ab incommuni illo ac scandaloso cum Protestantibus simulacris libertatis." That reply might, we think, be fairly interpreted as applying even to contributions for repairs. In the case from which "Perplexed" writes there is little danger of Catholics and Protestants having to see a common church, even if the Protestant building collapsed: in our opinion, therefore the local Catholics were not justified in supporting the dance in aid of funds to repair the Protestant church. It could possibly be argued that their action would be lawful if the church had great historic or artistic interest and was worth preserving from the standpoint — provided there was no scandal. It would, we think, be very difficult to avoid giving scandal in this matter in Ireland.

(Rev. J. McCarthy, D.D., B.C.L., Maynooth College, "The Irish Ecclesiastical Record", April, 1942).

# WHITE'S GARAGE

"A VICTIM OF SOME BUNGLING ALONG THE LEGAL LINE"

A month has elapsed since a proposal was put forward in the March edition of the "Limerick Socialist" to give a small measure of justice to Michael Kennedy. After working for 39 years at White's Garage, Kennedy was forced to retire through chronic ill-health. He failed to secure a pension, lump sum payment or even a redundancy settlement, despite his many and varied attempts to do so.

The proposal in last month's edition suggested that the sum of two hundred pounds should be given to Michael Kennedy by the people and representatives of the people who have made — and continue to make — profits from the garage. These people are the new owners of the garage, W.G. Bogue, W.R. Brown (U.S.A.), Dr. T.C. McGrath and T.A. Duffy (secretary), and the beneficiaries under the will of the former owner (Coleman White), James White, Curator of the National Gallery, Paddy White, grocer and Jim White, veterinary surgeon, both of Tulla, Co. Clare.

Michael Kennedy had been a member of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union up to the time of his retirement. On October 16th last year, the secretary of his trade union branch, Vincent Moran, wrote the following letter to Jim White, Veterinary Surgeon, of Alagha, Tulla, Co. Clare, "in a final endeavour to obtain .. some degree of compensation":

Re: Mr. Michael Kennedy, Cratloe, late of White's Garage, Shannon St.

Dear Mr. White,

*It has been suggested to us to write to you, as an Executor of the late Mr. White's Estate in a final endeavour to obtain for Mr. Mick Kennedy some degree of compensation in his present unfortunate plight and so help him through a most difficult period in his life, brought about by circumstances completely outside his making.*

*Mick Kennedy as you are no doubt aware, was in the employment of your late uncle R.I.P. for 38 years. Unfortunately in May 1971 he had to lay off work due to a foot complaint and since then his health has deteriorated rapidly. Presently he is suffering great mental and physical hardship and is in great distress.*

*In July 1971 the Garage changed ownership. The long serving members of the staff were made redundant and received compensation. Unfortunately because of his absence through illness Mick Kennedy was either overlooked or forgotten and was not declared redundant, which we feel he should have been. Through the offices of his next door neighbour, Mr. Jim Sexton, Solicitor, who took a personal interest in him, application was made to the late Mr. White to make Mick Kennedy either redundant or to grant him some degree of compensation. Mr. White replied that he felt he was*

*under no obligation to the man and said he had served his interests in the business.*

*Application was then made to the new owners, who while expressing their sympathy stated that as Mick Kennedy had never actually worked for them as such they rejected the appeal on the grounds that his job was still open. A request for an ex-gratia payment was also rejected as the Company stated because of large capital outlay, funds did not permit the granting of a payment much as they would like to do so.*

*Mr. Kennedy was advised to get his Union to pursue his redundancy claim through the Appeals Tribunal. This was done on the 25th July '73. We enclose copy of the findings of the Tribunal which are self explanatory. Unfortunately Mick Kennedy is not covered by the Redundancy Act and while he has been the recipient of expressions of sympathy in his plight both from Mr. Bogue, Managing Director of White's and from the members of the Appeals Tribunal, these you will agree are poor substitutes for practical assistance which Mick Kennedy now needs badly. It is with great difficulty he is able to walk a little and he is in constant pain. Certainly he will never work again and is the victim of very exceptional circumstances and is not provided for in*

*spare cash coming from that source.*

*It is hard to think that Mick is a victim of some bungling somewhere along the legal line. I regret I am powerless to help.*

Jim White's claim that the garage was rented rather than sold is difficult to understand. In a letter dated March 14th, 1973, Billy Bogue, the new managing director of the garage, made his position clear when he wrote to Jim Sexton, the solicitor acting for Michael Kennedy. Bogue's letter stated:

*... we would like to point out that this Company came under new ownership in July 1971, so Mr. Kennedy did not actually work for us at any time ... Needless to say, we agree that Mr. Kennedy is in a position of great hardship but we feel that if anyone is to give him an ex gratia payment it would be more appropriate that this should come from his long-term employer, Mr. Coleman White and/or from his Union.*

On July 6th last year, Billy Bogue repeated his statement about the ownership of the garage to the Redundancy Appeals Tribunal. Jim White's reference "that the yearly rental is quite small when



A close-up of Michael Kennedy's twisted hands.

*the Redundancy Act.*

*We would ask you therefore to kindly consider his position and appeal to you in your goodness to grant him some form of ex-gratia payment.*

*Thanking you.*

Seven weeks afterwards Jim White replied to this letter and once again the familiar "pass the buck" routine becomes evident, with, of course, the usual "expression of sympathy".

*Recently I discussed your problem re: Mr. M. Kennedy with the solicitor in charge of the late Mr. White's affairs. Also present was the other co-executor. He explained to us that legally we could not grant any payments other than those mentioned in the will. He pointed out that we had nothing to do with A. White Co. We were only responsible for Mr. White's affairs.*

*I know M. Kennedy well and would like to think he was treated well etc. I understand that Mr. White decided to rent the garage rather than sell it so that the employees would be well treated.*

*I may point out that the rental yearly is quite small when it is divided out between three needy widows, as stipulated in the will, so I can see no*

*it is divided out between three needy widows as stipulated in the will" does not, therefore, tally with these statements. It is also not easy to believe that all the stock and equipment of White's was handed over without charge to Bogue and his fellow directors.*

Jim White, apart from his lucrative practice as a Veterinary Surgeon and his own private money amassed over the years, has further added to his wealth under the provisions of his uncle's will. Despite this, however, he adopts the same Pontius Pilate attitude of all the other wealthy people involved in the case and hides behind his "I regret I am powerless to help" formula.

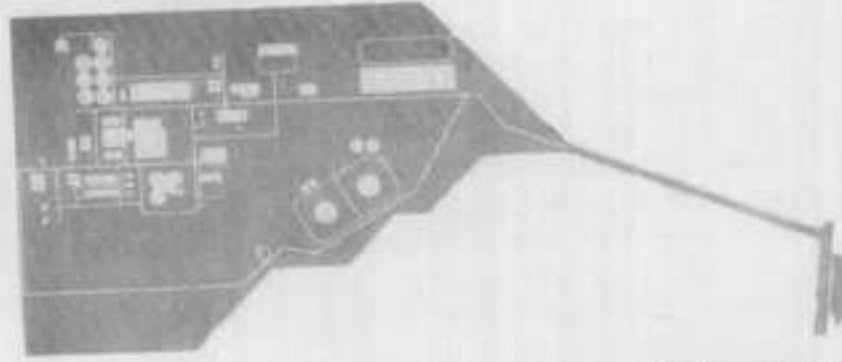
As far as is known most of new directors and the beneficiaries under the will profess to be Christians but it is obvious that the principle of "Love thy neighbour as thyself" has no place in their money-making activities. It is to counteract these kind of activities that trade unions continue to function. It is time for the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union to seek an immediate conference with all the parties concerned and to press for the implementation of the modest proposal to secure £200 for Michael Kennedy after his 39 years' service to White's Garage.



## ALCAN

## AND THE

## 'LEADER'



The announcement by the Alcan company of its plans to establish an alumina processing plant on Aughinish Island, near Foynes, has had a strange effect on the "Limerick Leader". In a series of articles the newspaper has emerged as a leading critic of Alcan, a strong conservationist champion and a firm supporter of the recently closed down Holly Park Knitwear factory.

The three-tiered saga started on March 2nd when in an article titled "Prestige Limerick Industry Doomed", the "Leader" reported:

*Holly Park of Limerick Limited, the Pallaskenry-based manufacturers of high-fashion knitwear for-export, are to terminate business this Friday ... A three-way plan to put the company back on a profitable footing ... has not materialised because the application to Foir Teoranta proved unsuccessful.*

The directors of the Holly Park company are John Cohane, his wife Heather, and the Knight of Glin, Desmond Fitzgerald. Thirty-nine women had been employed in the factory. The "Leader" report claimed that the closure "might well be described as a Common Market casualty" and also carried an interview with John Cohane, who was also acting as secretary of the company. The article stated that "since 1969 wages for the same work force have increased 74%", and went on to contrast the closure of Holly Park with the establishment of the Alcan plant:

*Is there still a need in County Limerick and Ireland generally for small businesses concentrating on high-fashion export as well as the giant multi-national corporations? According to recent reports, I.D.A. participation in the new Alcan project near Foynes amounted to £7,000,000 ... the plant ... will permanently employ 800 people. The I.D.A. investment, therefore, amounts to £8,750 per job created. If a comparable amount was spent to protect the jobs of the 45 people who in the main have been working at Holly Park for five or more years, the expenditure would come to £393,750. The application for a long term loan from Foir Teoranta was in fact for £50,000, a fraction more than £1,000 per present job.*

On Monday, March 4th, thirty-five of the women who had worked at Holly Park travelled to Dublin and picketed the offices of the Department for Industry and Commerce. In a front-page article in the "Irish Times" on March 5th, Christina Murphy reported on the protest:

*They carried a coffin bedecked with flowers and large pickets with the slogans, "Holly Park R.I.P.", "A Stitch in time saves 39". "Jackie Kennedy/Onassis loves our clothes, why don't you. The protest was their own idea they told me.*

This last sentence is significant, especially in view of the lack of trade union involvement in the demonstration. The protest had all the signs of a carefully organised job rather than a spontaneous reaction. The women were well-briefed and dutifully repeated Cohane's earlier information about the comparison with Alcan. Christina Murphy's article concluded with some nicely rehearsed "off-the-cuff" comments from the women:

*"We won't stop until we've got some satisfaction. The I.D.A. invested £7 million in the Alcan factory in Foynes. This represents an investment of £8,000 per job provided. The money Holly Park is asking for represents only £1,000 per job. Surely that is reasonable?"*

The next week (March 9th) in an editorial headed "Exit Holly Park - Enter ...?" the "Limerick Leader" took the matter a stage further. The editorial was written by Jim Kelly, who also serves as the paper's general manager and as the chief member of the Knights of Columbanus in Limerick. After casting doubts on the wisdom of the Alcan project, the article ended:

*It is tragically ironic that the closure of County Limerick's Holly Park Knitwear concern, a firm apparently loaded with potential and ideally suited to rural Ireland, should coincide with talk of transforming the virgin countryside with heavy industry. Those who believe moderately-sized light industry to be scenically, socially, culturally, and economically best for the proper development of the estuary and its environs will regard that as a bad omen.*

The "Leader's" campaign against Alcan then took on a poetic dimension. In John B. Keane's "Out In The Open" weekly column, an on the spot poet, named Michael Ryan, of Bawnreagh, Askeaton, wrote (March 9th):

*I weep for you, Aughinish, dear beloved island  
Where poets dreamed and strange philosophies did  
learned men unfold,  
Like merchandise they've taken you into the market  
place,  
And bartered you, my love, for flimsy paper gold.*

*Then where to timid teal and wily, weaving  
widgeon,  
Ye northland geese, farewell, go find some safer  
shore,  
And Reynard seek no peace 'neath  
Carrig-a-waldrarua,  
It, too, must go when shrill jackhammers bore.*

*I mourn but I must hate my own hypocrisy  
He stands not clean who will himself defile.  
For I, a seeker too of wealth's depravity  
Will be there when they rape that love isle.*

At least it could be said that the poet, Ryan, unlike that other seeker of "wealth's depravity", the "Limerick Leader", faced the Alcan plan in an open, honest way and made no attempt to disguise where his economic priorities lay.

On March 10th, in his back page column in the "Sunday Press", Michael Hand got in on the act. In his usual racy style he wrote:

*Heather Cohane stood amidst the covered machines and in the vastness of a silent factory talked about the ending of a dream. A dream which started with a two-woman factory and woollen garments that draped the frames of such notables as Jackie Onassis, Elizabeth Taylor, Shirley MacLaine and the Beverley sisters ... the machines have grown to a halt ... because the company was in debt, and losing £15,000 a year ... Holly Park lines sold in America at £75 a garment. The Limerick plant got £25.*

On March 16th Jim Kelly returned to the theme in his weekly "Spartacus" column in the "Limerick Leader". He wrote, in a piece headed "Holly Park ... Or Cesspit" as follows:

*A most interesting point was raised in the editorial in last week's "Leader" about the closure of an industry that had potential for expansion, and was very suitable to the environment of rural Ireland, while at the same time plans are proceeding for the erection of a "polluter of the countryside" just a few miles away. To keep Holly Park Knitwear industry in operation would only need £50,000 ... To get the Alcan project off the ground will cost the taxpayers many millions and ... it also carries with it the threat of pollution no matter how the bad effects of its waste products may be reduced or controlled. We must be a very stupid nation if we are not willing to learn for the destruction of the environment that has resulted from the proliferation of "dirty" industries in other countries ... There is still time for us to change direction and to let the commonsense take precedence over the search for the mighty dollar that comes with the horror of pollution and disease. Let us save such projects as Holly Park before we rush headlong into the type of industrialisation that no country wants. Why should we become the cesspit of the world - something that might suit the rest of the world, certainly - for the sake of money? After all, the quality of life is not entirely dependent on money and what money can buy.*

A week later Kelly, still wearing his Spartacus cap, adopted a new tack. In an article titled "Why Joy In Cork Over Alcan's Limerick Plans", he relied on some old-fashioned inter-county prejudice in his efforts to whip up opposition to Alcan. He commented on the action of the Cork Harbour Commissioners in congratulating the Limerick County Council on the decision of Alcan to build a factory on the shores of the Shannon Estuary:



... when a Corkman congratulates you on getting something, whether it be a factory, a job, or a wife, then it means, to those of us in the know, that he was not very interested in it himself! ... No doubt, the Alcan complex would give us much employment in Cork as in Limerick ... So why did Cork not want it?

The ironic thing about all this, of course, is that Kelly himself is a Corkman! But, then, logic and the "Leader" do not, obviously, go hand-in-hand.

A front page story in the same issue (March 16th) referred to the efforts of Tom O'Donnell, Minister for the Gaeltacht, to have the factory reopened. But the last shots had not yet been fired in the "Leader's" strenuous paper campaign. Working on the principle of keeping it in the family, reporter Billy Kelly, a son of Jim "Spartacus" Kelly, took up the running. In a lead story the following week (March 23rd) in the paper's County edition, titled "Holly Park's Aid Bid Fails - But firm in fight for life refuses to quit", the refusal of the £60,000 loan by Foir Teoranta was once again described. The article reported that 15 of the 39 women would be re-employed and that the business would be kept going on a reduced scale. Mr. Cohane was also on hand to comment: "I am sorry as hell to see each of these girls having to go - it burns me up".

In a "Page One Comment" in the same issue the "Leader" gave what appeared to be a final salute to Holly Park and again availed of the opportunity to put yet another boot into Alcan:

*So County Limerick's Joans of Arc - the girls of Holly Park ... are to soldier gallantly on. Under the courageous generalship of their employers, Jack and Heather Cohane, they may survive their early battles. But can they win the war against ultimate closure? Absentee industrialists - the modern version of landlords of another age - can profit at the expense of the Irish taxpayer by establishing State-subsidised industries which are clearly out of character with the Irish scene. Yet the Cohanes ... are refused a comparatively small loan.*

But how sincere is the "Leader" behind all this outraged rhetoric? £60,000 is a modest enough sum for a wealthy business company such as the "Leader" and represents less than one year's profits. As a measure of its sincerity and support for Holly Park will the paper now advance this sum as a loan to the clothing firm? Not on your life! The "Leader's" support for Holly Park is only paper-deep and stands no chance of being translated into cash terms. It is also most unlikely that it will offer to use some of its profits to supplement the workers' redundancy payments. And how far is the paper prepared to go in its opposition to the "absentee industrialists" of Alcan? As far as the first advertisements to be placed by that company in the yawning columns of the "Leader". And when this situation arises there will be no references to "cesspits" and "landlords" in the columns of the paper.

And what about the question of pollution? The "Leader" itself is contributing more to mental pollution in Limerick by all the bullshit it continues to churn out weekly. Its whole campaign against Alcan falls into that category.

And what of the pollution of human poverty in West Limerick? The "Leader" has never concerned itself with this topic, even when 25% of the people of many parishes in the area were being forced into emigration by economic hardship.

The truth of the matter is that most Limerick people had never even heard of Aughinish Island before the Alcan announcement. The campaign of the "Leader" against Alcan has been based on hypocrisy and deception and does not stand up to

any kind of close scrutiny.

Both Holly Park and Alcan are capitalist firms; they are in business primarily to make profits and not to serve the interests of the Irish people. Alcan is a multi-national company with factories in many countries throughout the world and Holly Park is a small local industry. The argument of the "Leader" in trying to present Holly Park as a better or more "suitable" industry is a spurious one from a working class standpoint. The attempt to oppose Alcan on a local or national basis is a narrow, backward step. Multi-national companies can only be confronted by the organisation of workers on an international scale. There is also the further consideration that the industrialisation of the country increases the numbers and strength of the Irish working class and hastens the day when workers can use their increased strength to bring about a socialist society.

The nostalgic yearning of the "Leader" for industries "suitable to the environment of rural Ireland" has nothing to offer to the Irish people, especially workers. The paper's efforts to turn back the clock to the era of protectionism - the era of small industries and small wages, when it was common for twenty or more labourers to queue up for the privilege of driving a wheelbarrow for meagre wages in de Valera's idyllic Republic - have no basis in economic reality. Irish capitalism has entered the main-stream of international capitalism, leaving the "Leader" like King Canute on the shore of the Shannon Estuary mouthing hypocritical clichés about pollution.

Apart from the fact that the workers are not trade unionists, some other aspects of the Holly Park case deserve further consideration. The claim that the workers' wages have increased by 74% since 1969 is surprising. In view of the fact that the wages of most Irish industrial workers have only increased by about half of this percentage in this period, the wages being paid at the factory in 1969 must have been rock bottom. The claim that Holly Park get £25 for each £75 garment sold in America is interesting. The figure of 200% spent on the transport and marketing of the garment seems excessive, even by American standards.

But there is a further twist to the story. Less than six months ago the "Leader" had a completely different tune to sing about Holly Park. On October 13th last year, in an article titled "Holly Park Bonanza", Helen Buckley reported on the firm's success and gave no clues about the impending financial crisis:

*Since its relatively recent origin, Holly Park of Limerick, the exclusive haute couture knitwear house, has had its biggest sales volume this year; the latter having culminated in the bonanza success in America of its latest collection.*

Helen Buckley went on to describe the various trips to America made by the Cohane's and the classy stores where their garments were on display. She further added: "... there is the additional attribute of Jack Cohane: dedicated republicanism. An American with a British-born wife, Jack's political ideology is Irish re-unification".

Fortunately we were spared the gory details of Cohane's way to "re-unification". However, it is clear from his previous letters to the press that "re-unification" policy involves the subjugation of the Northern Ireland Protestant community and is as certain to fail as his knitwear factory.

Cohane and his wife live in a luxuriously carpeted and furnished house at Holly Park. He is already an established writer and an ex-P.R. man, and has earned a reputation for his extravagant style of living and his lavish house parties. He is also one of the sharpest operators ever to blow into Limerick, but the £60,000 loan seems destined to elude him.

## WHAT THE CHEMIST DIDN'T SEE

The R.T.E. show, "Tangents", screened on its programme of Friday, March 8th, an interview with a Limerick chemist named Dolan. This individual in his pure innocence was the unwitting victim of the sophisticated and modernised version of the mediaeval practice of "bear-baiting". The game went like this:

Round 1: R.T.E. present in its "Cineclub" series a film called - "Persona". Director Bergman had once again cast his usual cold but for us subtitled eye on life.

Round 2: Despite their still working T.V. on/off switch some Limerick viewers sit riveted in a fatal fascination with "filth". The final scenes fade but the late flashing news and the sacred strains of a pictorial anthem are drowned out by the now outraged and gasping Limerick viewers. Even the nightly snack has to yield to groans of - "demoralising! nauseating! degrading! - something must be done - ..."

Round 3: The balls are still in the Limerick court. The outraged viewers fly to the arms of their prurient neighbours and whip themselves into a frenzy in their scandalised huddles. "Something must be done" they console each other - "A petition - yes - quick, while the impure thoughts still simmer in our memory - a letter to the Director General - yes - quick while the unsavoury filth still ferments in our brains".

Round 4: The news breaks - "Limerick again is outraged". The journalists smile like vultures. The recognise 'a kill'. Limerick has often provided a good feeding ground for "religious" and "conservative" carrion.

Round 5: Invite a spokesman from the outraged community. Invitation accepted ... good, spread the message - we have a "Bear". Now for the baiting. Poke the "Bear" a few nettling questions. Taunt him with some liberal comments. Challenge him into a fury. Great stuff. What entertainment!

Round 6: Like all amusements we grow tired. Now for the kill. "You are the spokesman for the group - can I ask you if you actually saw the film? "No .. but .." "Oh dear so you didn't see it after all!" Kill the bear and get on with the next item.

Aftermath of the Sport:

1. The journalists stroke their beaks in satisfaction.
2. The country has had a good laugh.
3. Poor Limerick!

Referee's Report:

"Could I suggest a prescription to the chemist in question? Search amongst your old stock, pull out a few gob-stopper sweets and suck hard when the next game starts! And a word of advice to Mr. Dolan's outraged neighbours. When they are next trapped in an "occasion of sin", situation with an R.T.E. programme remember that on/off switch. And before the traumatic onslaught of the multi-channel British "filth" perhaps they might even consider handing back their T.V. sets".

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"Feathery was so mean he made Scrooge look like Santa Claus". — Sean Bourke.

Part Three

# The Life and Letters of Feathery Bourke

MARRIAGE, ROBBERY, MALNUTRITION AND DEATH

Feathery Bourke's marriage came as a big surprise to his neighbours in High Street and Cornmarket Row. Once again his brother-in-law and business adviser, Leonard O'Grady played a part in the matter. When he first came to Limerick, O'Grady had stayed in the same house as a woman named Maude Guerin, before he married Feathery's sister, Annie. He introduced Maude Guerin to Feathery and after a fifteen-year friendship they got married in 1945. They were both then nearly fifty years of age and the marriage was more a business arrangement than anything else. They got married secretly at St. Michael's Church after 8 a.m. Mass. Two hours later Feathery was back in his shop buying and selling scrap.

Feathery was not over-generous to his wife and kept a tight control over her few financial transactions. Money and food were strictly rationed and both lived in frugal circumstances. Many stories are told about Feathery's relationship with his wife. One such story describes a novel method devised by him to husband their household stock of tea. Every morning, following breakfast with his wife, and before his departure for the scrap store, Feathery would go through a carefully thought out, secret ritual. He would catch a live fly on the kitchen walls which he would then place inside the tea-canister, firmly replacing the lid. On his return to his home at lunch-time Feathery would immediately check to see if the fly was still buzzing around inside the tea-canister. If the fly had escaped, he would know that his wife had made some tea for herself in his absence and would admonish her for doing so.

After about six years of marriage, Feathery's wife died. Her funeral, like her wedding, was a quiet affair, with only the same small number of people in attendance. After his wife's death, Feathery withdrew further into himself and continued to live a spartan existence. His relations with his three brothers and two sisters had never been easy. When one of his sisters got married she badly needed a house and Feathery was able to take advantage of her plight to sell her one of his houses. Rather than be under a compliment to his other sister, who lived next door to him in Cornmarket Row for many years, he ordered his daily dinner from the Stella Restaurant and had it delivered to his store by a messenger-boy on a bicycle.

Another example of Feathery's attitude to money, clothes and people was given one May morning in the early forties when one of the seven sons of his brother, Frank, made his first Holy Communion and was doing the "rounds" of his relatives. The well-scrubbed and well-dressed young nephew called to see his uncle Feathery at his High Street store. As the eager and excited boy approached in the rain Feathery briefly glanced at him and brusquely directed: "Run along home sonny and take off that new suit before you ruin it".

Feathery continued to add to his list of

properties and ground rents. He also kept up his business correspondence with the many people and interests involved in this field. In early July 1955 Dr. Hodges, the Protestant Bishop of Limerick, Ardferd and Aghadoe wrote to Feathery about a matter of rent and the untidy state of the approach to the yard gate of the bishop's house at the North Circular Rd. Feathery did not reply, and a few days later on July 7th the Bishop again wrote:

*Bishop's House,  
Limerick,*

*Dear Mr. Bourke,*

*Some days ago I wrote to your business address asking your approval for my plan to tidy, cut grass, weeds etc., on the approach to the yard gate of this residence. I do not know how far you are concerned in such a matter but I write to avoid any misunderstanding as I know you have certain rights at the place in question.*

*I shall be grateful for an early reply so that the gardener may proceed with the work.*

*Yours sincerely,  
E.C. Hodges, Bp.*

Feathery was not very co-operative about the Bishop's proposal to clean up the property of which he owned the ground rent. In a letter dated July 12th he replied:

*40 High Street,  
Limerick.*

*Dear Bishop,*

*In reply to your letter to hand of the 7th, I note its contents. I am quite agreeable to wait for settlement of rent applied for. And, furthermore, regarding your enquiries as to your duty or intentions in the back passage leading your yard, there is a separate lease dealing with this matter which your governing body has got with this property and I would suggest you inspect same.*

*I remain yours respectfully,  
M. F. Bourke*

In his further letter of July 16th, the Bishop enclosed a cheque for the ground rent and attempted to placate the testy Feathery. The gentle, almost apologetic tone of the Bishop's reply is in marked contrast with the formal and crusty language of Feathery:

*Dear Mr. Bourke,*

*Thank you for your letter of 12th. I now enclose cheque as per your account. I shall consult the agreement to which you refer at the Church offices in Dublin next week.*

*My request was not of a legal nature. I merely asked you if you had any objection, without prejudice to the agreement, to my tidying and cleaning the approach to the yard of this residence. Perhaps in sending the receipt you will let me know.*

Although it seems that the Bishop had a legal right to clean up the approach to the yard gate of his residence it is unlikely that Feathery relented. He continued to work at his store six days a week, including Bank Holidays. He never went on a holiday after his return from his last sea cruise in 1939, and he never bought new clothes in the last 25 years of his life. Fifteen years before his death he bought an old overcoat for ten shillings from Tom Kett to cover the hole that had developed in the seat of his old "crow/black" suit. Apart from his sea cruises, the only extravagant gestures he allowed himself, took place on the occasions of a number of Redemptorist Confraternity Retreats when, with another High Street landlord named Foley, the owner of the original "Mug-and-Four" lodging-house, he hired a jarvey-car and travelled in style to the "Fathers".

By 1964, Feathery was receiving an income of well over £1,000 per year from ground rents and was also earning money from his scrap metal business. The district around his store was known as a "tough" area and was occasionally frequented by prostitutes and their clients. Some well-known money thefts involving George Lawson, the High Street bookmaker and Tom Fahy, a publican across the road at the corner of Mungret Street took place close to Feathery's store. Fahy was eventually killed during a robbery in his bar. Feathery, however, seemed to have been impervious to the wiles of women. While his brother, Frank, was an experienced and skilful amateur boxer, Feathery, despite the loss of two fingers on his right hand, was no mean performer in ejecting unwanted or drunken people from his store. During his long life, he never allowed himself to be frightened by threats from anybody.

But Feathery, too, suffered one serious robbery in his life. This took place at his house, Portland Lodge, North Circular Road, on January 27th, 1968, when he was 73 years old. He was attacked and beaten by three young men, who also gagged him and tied him. During the evidence given at the Limerick Circuit Court case in May 1968, when a man was charged with the robbery with violence of £1,800, it emerged that Feathery was not sure of the precise amount of money in his home safe. He claimed to have had £2,500 in the safe and to have spent about £700 of this. All the money robbed from the safe was part of the £2,205 sum exchanged by Feathery at the Westminster Bank, London, in 1933. The sum made up of £20 and £10 "tissue-paper" notes which had long been withdrawn from circulation.

While Feathery had little formal education and was not always literate as a letter-writer he had an uncanny knowledge about ground rents and property. This knowledge was used solely for his own advantage, but six years before his death he offered his advice free of charge to one of his long-time neighbours, Michael O'Grady owner of the Seven Stars Bar in Robert Street, had been seeking unsuccessfully for five years to buy the ground rent of his premises. One day, on his way home after yet another unsuccessful visit to his



solicitor, he met Feathery standing outside the door of his store.

At this time McKenna's shop, which was next door to Michael O'Grady's bar, was up for sale. Feathery asked O'Grady if he was going to buy this shop. "Let me alone", said Michael O'Grady, "I can't even buy the ground rent of my own pub". "Come in, sit down and tell me all about it", said Feathery. Michael O'Grady went in and told Feathery that the ground rent was £2 per year and that it was owned by Mrs. Lena McCarthy, (Nee Barrett), of the Roche's Street business family. Feathery looked at his watch and then spoke:

*It is five-to-one now. Go home and have your dinner. Go out then to where Mrs. McCarthy lives and speak nicely to her. Explain to her that you have a big family (8 boys), and fix things up with her.*

"How much will I offer her", Michael O'Grady asked him.

"£30 - 15 years at the present rate you are paying", Feathery replied.

Michael O'Grady had been prepared to pay a few hundred pounds to buy out the ground rent and this small sum came as a surprise to him. He told this to Feathery.

"That's all it's worth. Don't offer any more", Feathery instructed.

Michael O'Grady went off that afternoon and saw Mrs. McCarthy. He had been told by Feathery to suggest to her that if she invested the sum offered for the ground rent (£30) in a bank loan trust she would get back more than £2 per year in interest. Mrs. McCarthy sent for her solicitor and accepted the £30 offer. Michael O'Grady also paid £10 to her solicitor and £10 to his own solicitor and walked home with the ground rent documents in his pocket.

In order to express his gratitude for this help Michael O'Grady called on Feathery shortly after this incident and said: "Let me know when you are going away on holidays and I will go with you".

"Don't you know I haven't made the price of my dinner here in the last six months", Feathery replied.

"Surely, Mikey, you should be able to take a holiday with all your money", Michael O'Grady suggested.

Feathery looked at him through his beady eyes and countered: "If you enjoy spending money like I enjoy saving it, you will understand why I don't go on holidays".

After Feathery's death, Michael O'Grady stated: "It was very hard to understand how such an intelligent man could lead such a terrible life".

In an obituary article, published in the local press on September 15th last year, Feathery's nephew, Sean Bourke, has given a description of his uncle in the last decade of his life.

*But for the last ten years of his life Feathery Bourke became less and less preoccupied with the business of scrap and concentrated more and more on the proceeds of his various properties in Limerick and Dublin. He still walked six days a week from his lodge near the Bishop's estate in the North Circular Road (he actually sold the estate to the bishop) to the City Market. Here he would sit forlornly watching a rapidly-changing world go by, an affluent world of plastic and pre-cast concrete in which there was little demand for scrap of any kind, and in moments of boredom he would pore over a small mountain of Tenancy Agreements and Deeds of Title with a magnifying glass clutched in the three remaining fingers of his right hand.*

When Sean Bourke first came down from Dublin to live in Limerick about three years ago, he took a copy of his book, *The Springing Of George Blake*, along to present it to his uncle at his High Street store. Feathery told him very emphatically that he did not want the book. "All I'm interested in reading", he declared, "is advertisements for ground rents and properties. I can't be wasting my time reading books". Then, as an afterthought, he went on: "Anyway what would happen to it when I'm gone? It would be 'blaggarded'. Just like all this". He waved his arm around to embrace the assorted rubbish piled up in his shop. "Yes, 'blaggarded', like everything else I have".

In the last years of his life Feathery had become a complete recluse. His house became untidy and dirty. He ate sparingly, living on a food budget of about thirty shillings per week, and



An early childhood picture of Feathery Bourke.

existing mainly on bread and milk. On Christmas Days he dined on a boiled egg. When he died last September he was found to be suffering from malnutrition.

His funeral, like his wedding, was a quiet affair. Sean Bourke refused to attend the burial. As the hearse passed the Munster Fair Tavern, Bourke, was inside drinking a pint of Murphy's porter. He went out briefly, glass in hand, and, out of curiosity watched his uncle's coffin entering St. Lawrence's Cemetery. Bourke explained that he saw no reason why he should go to the funeral as he had neither affection nor respect for his uncle in life and he had no intention of being hypocritical about him in death. There were also a few other considerations involved. Feathery had refused to attend Sean Bourke's mother's funeral in 1967. When a woman from Bengal Terrace called to tell him that his brother Frank's widow had just died, Feathery told her that that was none of his business. In the absence of Sean Bourke and his brothers, Feathery's coffin was shouldered by some fellow scrap-dealers with the help of Leonard O'Grady, his brother-in-law.

There was also another reason for the bad feeling between Sean Bourke and his uncle. Some months before Feathery's death, Sean Bourke

repaired some electric wiring for him at the High Street store. The day after Sean Bourke returned to check that all was in order Feathery promptly ordered him out of the store. Sean Bourke asked his uncle what had brought about the dramatic change in his attitude from the day before when he had asked his nephew to help him. Feathery refused to tell him. Sean Bourke attributed this behaviour to Feathery's phobia about people being after his money and to his life-long fear of familiarity with his relatives or anyone else.

A few days later Sean Bourke wrote to Feathery by registered letter and told him that as far as his own family was concerned, "he could stick his money up his arse". His nephew also told him that "the reason he was incapable of seeing good in any other human being was that he thought everyone else was as nasty-minded and as mean spirited as himself". Sean Bourke also told Feathery that "he felt sorry for him".

Feathery made no will, telling Tommy McInerney, a neighbour from Upper Denmark Street, "let them fight it out between them". If he had made a will before his death there seems little doubt that Sean Bourke would have been crossed out of it, if he had ever been in it. As it happened Feathery never made a will. He was emotionally incapable of making a will at this stage, since making a will involved giving, albeit posthumously, and Feathery Bourke had never given himself the habit of giving anything to anyone in his entire life.

Since his return to Limerick, Sean Bourke had shown a fascination with the spending of money almost appositely equal to his uncle's. He frequently gave the impression that he wished to get rid of his earnings on his book as quickly as possible. In the last three years he has spent over £20,000, mainly on the purchase of alcohol. This sum is certainly far more than Feathery spent on food, drink and clothes in his whole life. The nephew's expenses for one night's drinking and "treating" frequently exceeded his uncle's yearly food bill.

The bad feeling in the family continued after Feathery's death. When Sean Bourke was attempting to move into his uncle's house last November, two other nephews, Tommy O'Grady and Michael Finnan made an early morning raid and demolished the house. They feared that Bourke might establish squatter's rights to the house and the three acres of land at the North Circular Road, and that he might later sell the property for his own benefit. They also claimed that Bourke had sold some scrap stored at Feathery's shop. Sean Bourke stated that he intended to occupy the house to keep from falling into decay, and that he sold what few odds and ends of scrap remained because already tinkers and other people had broken into the store and had stolen some of it.

Following his sea cruise in July, 1937, a more humane and understanding side of Feathery appeared to be struggling to break out and find expression in his character. The struggle was a short-lived and losing one, and he quickly retreated into his old hardened shell. He devoted his long life to the single-minded pursuit of money and property. He died of malnutrition and at his death he left an estimated £100,000 in land, property, ground rents and money. Through his efforts over sixty years he had succeeded in becoming one of the richest men in St. Lawrence's Cemetery. Concluding his obituary, Sean Bourke wrote: "They don't make them like that any more". He could have added the word - "mercifully".

(Concluded)

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# THE 'SEVEN DAYS' DRUG TRIP

The silly season in the local press has started a little earlier than usual this year. The spell of fine weather in late March may have led the "Limerick Leader" to advance the season's opening date. On March 23rd, a report by Ted Gale on the "Leader's" front page, headed "Schoolchildren on drugs rampage in Limerick", stated:

*A teenage drugs rampage is in full swing in Limerick city at present with young boys and girls of all classes involved. Hashish and other soft drugs are mainly favoured, with a sprinkling of L.S.D. The reasons given - anonymously - for*

*teenage drug taking are numerous and include - to escape from nagging parents and teachers, for kicks, for the pleasurable feeling that results to become high; there is a spirit of rebellion, too, against such institutions as school and even security; also to a lesser extent, an element of bravado. The drugs change hands in licensed premises, cafes, hotels and other centres where young people and "pushers" operate. The drug takers include youngsters from secondary, technical, national, in fact every category of school ... both boys and girls are taking drugs from 14 years of age upwards, in some cases even younger.*

Despite the fact that no names were given of the schools and drug centres involved or even the number of children taking drugs, the story was repeated in the national papers on March 23rd.

By Sunday, March 24th, the "Leader" "flier" had really gone into circulation and the "Sunday Press" followed up with some further details. In a longer story titled "Limerick is alarmed by drug craze", the "Sunday Press" article, obviously "milked" from the "Limerick Leader", stated:

*Dr. John Fennelly, R.M.S., of St. Joseph's Hospital, Limerick, warned recently of the growing dangers when he revealed that the number of addicts being admitted to the hospital had increased considerably. College students boast openly of taking drugs ... A Garda source said ... "about all the politicians should stay out of this affair. Already they have enabled pushers to get out of town because they did not want certain hotels and the other public places raided. What bothers many of us is the question - how did they know we had intended to raid these places? Not even we knew, but we learned it later as a result of politicians boasting".*

On Monday, March 25th, the affair developed further when it was discussed at a meeting of the Limerick City Council. With a delicate sense of

selectivity, the "Limerick Chronicle", under the heading "Newspaper story on drugs condemned", reported:

*The City Council, at its meeting on Monday night, passed a resolution unanimously calling on the Editor of the "Sunday Press" to produce evidence to substantiate the allegation that local politicians were hindering the Gardai in their investigations of the drug problem in the city. The Council also called on the paper to disclose the name of the person or persons "who supplied the false information and to clear the good name of Limerick".*

The report contained no reference to the original "Schoolchildren on drugs rampage" article by Ted Gale published in the "Limerick Leader" on March 23rd. Meanwhile the story has spread to another medium. While the City Council meeting was in progress, seven people from the R.T.E. programme, "Seven Days" - a producer, a reporter, a researcher, a production assistant and a three-man camera and sound crew - arrived in Limerick to film the drug activity in the city. The "Drugs in Limerick" programme was scheduled for transmission on the following Friday evening (March 29th).

Early on Tuesday morning the T.V. team set off in search of the drug "scene". A number of people were contacted and it quickly became clear that the drug "story" was non-existent.

Later in the afternoon of the same day, the seven "Seven Days" searchers scrapped the whole project, packed their gear at the Ryan Ardhu Hotel and returned to Dublin. Their trip to Limerick, including wages, overnight accommodation and travelling expenses had cost R.T.E. over £300.

On Wednesday, March 27th, the "Limerick Leader", under the heading "Gardai deny drug craze in city story", published a front page statement issued by the Garda Press Office in Dublin:

*We are referring to the article in the "Sunday Press" on 24th March, 1974 .. in which it was alleged that local politicians were hindering the drug squad's efforts to fight the alarming drug craze which is now widespread in the city. An official spokesman at Garda headquarters, Dublin, today categorically denied that allegation. Further he pointed out that drug abuse is not prevalent in Limerick. The Garda in the city continue to receive special training to deal with this problem if it arises.*

Again, the "Leader" conveniently omitted any reference to its own first story. The next

instalment came when Noel Smith wrote an article titled "No Drug Panic In Limerick" on the "Sunday Independent" on March 31st. This piece stated:

*According to Dr. John Fennelly, R.M.S. at St. Joseph's Psychiatric Hospital, five drug addicts were admitted in 1973, and he himself was aware of 50 people illicitly taking drugs in Limerick. The head of the city's wide-embracing Limerick Social Service Centre, Father Donal Giltinane, said he did not think the centre had come across a single case of drug addiction despite the fact that its eleven professional social workers and a full time youth officer covered the city.*

Anyone in touch with reality in Limerick will know that these statements represent a fairly true picture of the drug situation. The "Limerick Leader" article, on which the "Sunday Press" story was based, was obviously a concoction of wild allegations and rumours. The "Press" reporter in Limerick, Tony Purcell did not write the drug article and was well aware of the real position. When the controversy over the "Sunday Press" article broke out he contacted his Burgh Quay Office in Dublin and complained about the contents of the story.

The facts about the Limerick drug scene are not too difficult to obtain. They are:

1. Four members of the Gardai in Limerick have received specialised training in drugs investigation and detection. These include a Ban Garda and a Sgt. Barry. One of the trained policemen has complained repeatedly over their non-use of the drugs "beat". It is generally accepted in William Street Garda Barracks that this is the source of the press "leak".
  2. The doctors in St. Joseph's Hospital have shown some concern for the problem as it exists. Since Christmas Drs. Fennelly, O'Hanrahan and Fehilly have given more than 30 lectures to various groups in the city on the subject.
  3. Since last year 10 cases of L.S.D. overdoses have been treated in the hospital, 3 since Christmas.
  4. Some sort of loose grouping, made up of gardai, doctors, and social workers exists. Between them this group has managed to compile the names of 60 Limerick people who are known drug takers.
  5. Two suspected 'pushers' are currently under surveillance by the Gardai.
  6. There is a drugs unit at the Henry St., Social centre. The main people involved in this are Sr. Caoimhin and Sean Hillery, a chemist from Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare.
- The "Limerick Leader's" "sensational" story of March 23rd ended in suitable silly season style:

*The stories floating around locally on drug taking have almost entered the sphere of folklore. The most popular concerns a research worker who apparently first experimented with a particular drug and took a monstrous dose. He is said to be still high - after a trip which has lasted over 25 years.*

Ted Gale should take up handball: he is, obviously, the makings of a first-class "ball-hopper".

And what of the 60 drug addicts in Limerick? According to Oliver Flanagan's recent litany of social ills, Irish capitalism is making a bad job of trying to cure all the problems and misery of its sick society. What is required is a change from capitalism to socialism; the replacement of production for profit by production for use. When this is achieved there will be no need for people to escape from reality by drug taking.